The Whole Law In Just One Word: Love

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Preacher: Mike Salvati

[0:00] Well, happy belated Thanksgiving. I know that for many of us, Thanksgiving is a wonderful thing, but others of us, Thanksgiving is a hard thing because, let's be frank, relationships tend to be messy.

And relationships can be downright hostile from time to time. Here's why. Whenever you have people coming together, there's usually some kind of relational mess that happens.
Has anybody seen the Peanuts Thanksgiving? Do you know who Pigpen is? Pigpen is that little guy with kind of the smoky dirt cloud that kind of goes around with him.
That's kind of like a picture of us. We bring this little kind of relational mess around with us because we've got something in us called the flesh that likes to wreak havoc on relationships.
The church is no exception to relational mess. Our church is no exception to relational mess.
[1:07] I don't know about you, but imputing motives? When someone says something to you and you think, oh, I know why they're telling me this. I know what's going on in them.

Or maybe it's defensiveness or being critical with one another, holding grudges, avoiding each other, fear, control, gossip, envy, anger.
All of these things wreak havoc within a church. It's the little dirt around Pigpen. Now, I don't know about you, but I see all of these things I've just named in me.
How about you? Every one of us has this potential to inflect harm on our church and not just insignificant harm, significant harm.
What resides in us, what Paul calls the flesh, can undo what God by His Spirit is seeking to do.
[2:18] Unite us in love. Apparently, back when this letter was written to the churches in Galatia, there was this major threat of losing the gospel of grace with this threat of legalism.

But in addition to this threat to the gospel, there was this other threat of infighting. And so if you're in Galatians 5, if you look at verse 15, we read it this way.
But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another. Now, if you flip down to 5, 19, and 20, we read, now the works of the flesh are evident, sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy.
It's a kind of infighting. Now, it should not surprise us when we hear that when a people loses sight of the gospel, that there is this resultant infighting.
Because when you lose sight of the gospel of grace, when it ceases to become central to your community, you tend to forget what God in His love has done for you.
[3:37] And when you forget what God in His love has done for you on the cross, it's just a matter of time before you revert back to your old way of doing things, living for your flesh.

And when your flesh is governing your interactions with others, especially within the church, the result is a harmful chaos, biting, devouring, and consuming.
We're all prone to give way to our flesh and wreak havoc on one another. Whether that's on a Sunday morning, whether that's on a ministry team, whether that's in your life group, whether that's in your marriage, or in your parenting, or in your friendships, our flesh is a threat.
But it's not the gospel way. Our freedom in Christ doesn't give us the license to wreak havoc in our flesh, but our freedom in Christ compels us to serve one another in love.
So let me put it this way. Our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity for our flesh, but an opportunity for our love. So this morning, I'm going to walk you through this passage, and I want you to see three things.
[5:06] There is a gospel reminder in 513. You were called to freedom, brothers. There is a gospel warning. Also in 13, do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh.

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And then there is a gospel mandate. It's the end of verse 13. Through love, serve one another. Our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity for our flesh, but an opportunity for our love. So let's look at this gospel reminder.
You were called to freedom, brothers. Brothers, who's doing this calling? Well, if you look back to verse 8, Paul says, this persuasion is not from him who calls you.
The one who calls us to freedom is God himself. It is an effectual call in which once you hear the gospel, you respond to God.
[6:13] God has called every Christian in this room to freedom in Christ.

On January 1st, 1863, in the middle of the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Quote, that all persons held as slaves are and henceforward shall be free.
End quote. At that moment in our nation's history, every slave in the Union was legally free. Regardless of how they, the slaves, felt about it. Regardless of how their southern masters felt about it.
Regardless of how the southern economy felt about it. They were free. And ever since, we've been fighting for the equality of our African American brothers and sisters.
[7:22] The gospel is God's emancipation proclamation to sinners that sets us free.

Freedom from what? Well, freedom from a certain slave mentality. Thinking that our obedience to God's law is what saves us.
That's what we're set free from. We're set free from thinking that we save ourselves by obeying God's law.
We're set free from thinking that if only I obey God's word so much, then he'll love me. We're set free from that.
And this particular slave mentality is called legalism. It's one of two mistakes that distort the gospel. But we know.
[8:26] And this is what Paul has been hammering on in the book of Galatians. We know that it's not our obedience that saves us. It's only the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross that saves us.

And that saves us once and for all and forever. If you believe it. If you believe it. If you believe in what God has done for you through Christ on the cross, you have been set free.
God has called you to that. God has set you free. God has called you to that. God has called you to that. God has called you to that. How do you apply this?
Well, if you're not a Christian in the room, you need to turn to Christ and call out to him to set you free. You simply say something like this.
Lord Jesus. Risen Lord Jesus. Set me free from me. And if you are a Christian in the room, here's what I'd like you to do.
[9:38] Turn to the person next to you. And say this. Christ has set me free. Go on. Christ has set me free.

So, this gospel reminder is this reminder that God himself through the cross has called us to freedom. It's God's emancipation proclamation.
And if you believe it, you're free. Free from earning God's acceptance through obedience to his law.
So, we move from a gospel reminder to a gospel warning.
This is the second part of verse 13. For you were called to freedom, brothers. Brothers, only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. If one mistake, one distortion of the gospel is legalism.
Seeking to earn God's love and acceptance through obedience to his law. There's another mistake. There's another way to fall off the horse of the gospel.
[10:52] You can fall off the gospel in one of two ways. If legalism, we lose the gospel of grace, licentiousness is the abuse of the gospel of grace.

Legalism loses the gospel. Licentiousness abuses the gospel. If legalism says, I must obey the law to be saved, licentiousness says, now that I'm saved by God's grace, I don't need to obey the law of God anymore.
In that word, licentiousness, I hope you hear the word license. This thinking is that God's justifying grace gives us license to sin.

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It does not. What you need to understand is both legalism and licentiousness are just two different forms of slavery.
So we read in 13a, you are freed, saved by believing in the gospel of grace. And then 13b, only do not use your salvation as an opportunity for the flesh.
[12:12] If you truly get what Christ has done for you. If you truly understand the gospel. If you realize that all of your sin, past, present, future has been forgiven at the cross once and for all and forever.

However, if you realize that, and you're an immature Christian, you can hear a blank check to sin. Holy cow, man, he has forgiven me all that.
I can do whatever I want. It's like a teenage boy who gets his father's credit card and unlimited balance. He's just going to rack up charges, baby. But that's an abuse of God's grace.
The gospel is not an opportunity for the flesh. Let me help you understand what this word flesh means. When you read this, when you hear the word flesh, you might be thinking the skin and the muscle on your bones.
Don't think that. The apostle Paul is not talking so much about your physicality. The apostle Paul, when he talks about do not give an opportunity for the flesh, he's talking about a different aspect of who you are.
[13:36] He's talking about that part of you or parts of you that have yet to be brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ. That part or parts of you that have yet to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

That's your flesh. That part of you that resists God still. Let me try to put it this way. Do you remember in the Garden of Eden, Jesus was praying, dripping drops of blood?
Do you remember what he prayed? Father, not my will, but your will be done. Here's what the flesh says. The flesh says, my will be done, not yours.
That's how the flesh operates. So fleshly thinking, fleshly feeling, fleshly desires, they all have the motto, me first.
Self-centered thinking, self-centered feelings, self-centered desires that look around and say, I don't exist for you, you exist for me.
[14:49] That's the flesh. Now, I want to help you think this through a little bit. Because when you became a Christian, all of who you are was crucified with Christ.

I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, Galatians 2.20. If you flip over to 5.24, you read, and those who belong to Christ, Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
So the flesh has been crucified at the cross. And what that's getting at, it's the power of the flesh has been crucified at the cross.
But here's the distinction. The cross, though it crucified the power of the flesh, did not eradicate the presence of the flesh.
That will happen when either you die or when Jesus comes back. And now we have this existence in the presence of God without the flesh, without the sinful nature.
[15:57] It's going to be really weird. Wonderfully so. So the point is, the flesh still exerts influence in our lives.

Which means daily, we have a choice to make. A choice between either sowing to the flesh or sowing to the spirit.
And what Paul is saying here is, do not use your freedom. What Christ has purchased for you at the cross. Do not use your salvation as an opportunity for the flesh.
That word opportunity is a great word in and of itself. It was used of an army's forward base of operations in order to mount military campaigns.
In order to advance its purposes. It's a place from which to expand. And what Paul is saying is, don't let your salvation purchased through Christ become the base of expanding your flesh.
[17:09] So here's what God is telling us this morning. Do not use what Christ has accomplished for us.

As some kind of beachhead for fleshly advance. Don't do that. Christ did not die for us so that we could live for our flesh.
Christ died for us so that we could truly love one another. Now, I thought it would be helpful to spell this out in a little bit more detail.

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So I want to introduce you to a family. The Fleshlies. Maybe you've heard of the Brady Bunch. This is the Fleshly Bunch.
Maybe you'll see yourself. The first person I want to introduce you to is Ivan Fleshly. A.K.A.
[18:15] Ivan the Imputer. Ivan imputes motives onto other people as if he knows their hearts. It usually shows up when someone is saying something that Ivan doesn't want to hear.

Ivan is quick to say, there you go again. Judging me. Ivan wreaks havoc in relationships.
Denise Fleshly. Defensive Denise. Denise is very guarded when you raise issues that threaten her. She lives in fear. She's guarded. She's suspicious. She's self-protective. Oftentimes it's because something's happened in her past.
But when Denise is in a life group, Denise does not share much. Because the Fleshly. Because the Flesh is ruling her.
[19:27] And then there's Gary Fleshly. Gary the Grudge. He holds past offenses or perceived past offenses against the one who offended him.

Gary. Gary. His lack of forgiveness has hardened his heart. And he's become quite cynical. You know when Gary shows up.
Gary. You know when Gary shows up. Because when Gary shows up to a Christian gathering, usually a chill runs through the room. And then there's Alice Fleshly.
Alice the Avoider. Alice avoids all conflict. If you've offended her or she's offended you, she will find out where you're sitting on a Sunday morning.
And she will purposely sit as far away from you as possible. Or if Alice sees you walking towards her in the hallway, Alice will quickly find an alternative route to her destination and go after it.
[20:38] She thinks she's keeping the peace. But in reality, peace, peace. When there is no peace.

And then there's Chris Fleshly. Chris the Controller. Chris always needs to have the last word. He always needs to be the one that makes the decision.
Sometimes Chris will be heard saying, Better to ask for forgiveness afterwards than permission beforehand. And if you go and make plans without Chris, he's deeply offended.
Chris has a cousin. Her name is Kendra. Kendra Fleshly. She's also a controller. And here's how Kendra rolls. Her life, her marriage could be in shambles.
She could have just lost her job. Her mortgage payment might be past due. But when you go up to Kendra and ask how she's doing, she says, Everything's great.
[21:49] Everything's just fine. Controlling the way things look. Could it be an operation of the flesh?

When any of these fleshlies are given an opportunity to take over among God's people, it can wreak havoc among God's people.
And not only does it wreak havoc, it dramatically limits the degree of relationship and intimacy and mutual understanding.
It limits the kind of peace and unity a fellowship can experience. Some may say that this is like a multiple personality disorder of the flesh.
Because I'm guessing if you're like me, you've seen a number of these fleshlies in you. Now I could just move on to the last point here.
[23:01] But I wouldn't serve you well. When you see a fleshly show up in you, whether that's imputing motives or being defensive, avoiding, projecting that everything is fine when it's not, you need to say something to that fleshly.

You need to say something like this to yourself. You need to say something because I belong to Christ. This manifestation of the flesh belongs on the cross.
When I see defensiveness in me, I must speak. That has been crucified with Christ. When I see imputation of motives coming from me on another, that's been crucified with Christ.
When I avoid people, that's been crucified with Christ. Get back on Christ's cross.
That's what you need to say. You can't brush it aside. You must kill it. If we don't put the fleshlies in their place, which is on the cross, they will find their place among us and wreak havoc.
[24:31] That's why you have this warning in 515. But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you're not consumed by one another. Do you know what this is a picture of? This is like a picture of a dog fight, biting and devouring one another.

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My favorite book is Jack London's Call to the Wild. And it's a story of this dog named Buck who goes from living a really comfortable life to going wild.
And Buck turns into this raging beast that kills. Brothers and sisters, is the church to be a place like a dog fight?
Biting and devouring one another? Consuming each other? That is not the gospel way. So let's now turn to the gospel way.
At the end of verse 13, we have a gospel mandate. But through love, serve one another. If we're not to use our freedom in Christ as an opportunity for the flesh, what opportunity does our freedom in Christ afford us?
[25:55] How are we to use our freedom in Christ? But through love, serve one another. Our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity to serve ourselves ourselves in our flesh, but to serve one another in love.

Do you see that word in verse 13? It's in the ESV. It says, but through love, serve one another. The English kind of loses its force.
It really means to enslave yourself to others. It means to give up your rights, die to yourself, and seek what's best for others like a slave.
A slave has no rights. And what Paul says here, we are to enslave ourselves to one another through love.
Does anybody see the paradox here? Our freedom in Christ results in enslaving ourselves to others.
[27:11] Do you see it? It's not enslavement to the law. It's not enslavement to the flesh. It's enslavement through love to one another. The Apostle Paul talks about this in Ephesians 5.21 as submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Christ freed us from ourselves, serving ourselves to serve one another in love.
Another way to think about it is this. In our church, there's not one master with many servants. One servant with many masters. You figure that? See that? If you're hearing this right, you're seeing yourself as a servant, seeking to serve the many masters of our church.
And Paul zeroes in on the motive. Through love, enslave yourself to one another. Our freedom in Christ from the law is a mandate to serve one another through love.
[28:36] It's not optional. It's a command. When you hear the word love, don't think feelings, think commitment.

Don't think 70s love songs. I'm lost in love and I don't know much. Do, do, do, do. Don't think love song.
Think wedding vow. One spouse vowing to another to do what's best for the other, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health till death do us part.
Our love for one another makes us slaves to one another to submit ourselves to each other. So, biblical love is essentially an abiding commitment to one another to do what's best for each other even at great cost to ourselves.
It's the nature of slavery. You don't need to go any further than our Lord Jesus Christ for the model of this. He himself said, I came not to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many.
[30:05] He is our model. And did you notice in verse 14 how Paul grounds this command to love, this mandate?

He says, for the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law is fulfilled in just one word.
All 613 commandments fulfilled in one word. Love. Do what's best for the other. Do the greatest good as you would have the greatest good done to you.
Now, if you're thinking right now, if you're looking over at your spouse and saying, finally, someone is telling you how to be my servant. You're totally missing the point.
This is a call to you and save yourself to your spouse, to your family, to your life group, to your church.
[31:14] love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. Love. What are we aiming at here?

It's very interesting because you shall love your neighbor as yourself. If I really like Ben and Jerry's chocolate therapy, does that mean you love me by getting chocolate therapy for me all the time?

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Is that what slavery looks like? No, the understanding of what the Bible is this. The best thing I know is for me is Jesus.
He's my first love. He's your first love. He's the vine. We're the branches. We love each other best by pointing one another to Jesus sacrificially. So I hope you see what's going on in this passage. We've been set free from the law through Christ in order to become slaves of one another just like Christ which fulfills the whole law which pleases Christ.
[32:25] We don't fulfill the law to be saved. We've been saved so now we fulfill the law by Christ-like love for one another.

Our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity for our flesh but an opportunity for us to love one another like Christ. And do you know what's really encouraging about this passage? This is why I reached into verse 16.
Paul says but I say walk by the spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. Do you know what's so encouraging about verse 16? when you realize you're more like pig pen and you make relational messes where you go isn't it good to know that God has put an inside man in you the Holy Spirit.
And what the Holy Spirit is looking to do is to direct and empower us daily to love one another sacrificially to fulfill the law and please Christ.
That's what it means to walk by the spirit. To daily depend on the spirit to direct and empower us in order to not gratify the desires of the fleshlies but to live out love.
[33:52] The Holy Spirit is the hallmark feature He is the hallmark feature of the new covenant people of God.

He was the one anticipated in Jeremiah 31 Ezekiel 36 and Joel 2. He is the game changer God who would come and dwell within us to work in each of us to fulfill God's law directing us and empowering us daily to love each other sacrificially isn't it good to know that the third person of the Trinity dwells in us to bring all this love stuff about.
He wants to do it. Do you remember the fruit of the spirit? Do you remember the first fruit of the spirit?
Love. the fulfillment of the whole law is just one word and the Holy Spirit is seeking to bring it about in us.
Our shared freedom in Christ is not an opportunity to gratify our flesh with one another but to fulfill the law with one another to love one another.
[35:20] So I want to boil this down a little bit more. I want to boil it down to just one question that is a diagnostic question to govern your relationships with other people in our church.

Here's something that you can be asking yourself before you write an email. Before you send a text. Before you make a phone call. Before you talk to someone about someone else.
Before you think certain thoughts about someone. Before you act towards someone. Here's the question that you need to be asking yourself from this text.
Will this thought does this feeling will this word does this text email or action does this lovingly serve my brother or my sister in the relationship with Christ?
Does it serve their relationship with Jesus? That's how we love one another. And inevitably here's what's going to happen. when he started asking that question and started asking okay God this doesn't feel right feels kind of defensive what's going on spirit lead on.
[36:38] You know what's going to happen? It's going to expose the spirit out of love for you. He's going to expose sin in you. He's going to expose the fleshlies. And now you're going to have a choice to either respond in faith and repentance or ignore the spirit's prompting.

So when I start praying and asking beforehand will this whatever it is serve this person's relationship with Christ? Will this really love them?
It helps me to start seeing my imputing motives tendency. And it helps me then to be able to say wait wait I'm imputing motives on that person. I don't know what's going on in their heart.
Oh Lord Jesus that belongs with you on the cross. And then I'm reminded of this. 1 Corinthians 13 7 Love believes all things.
I'm going to believe the best in this person. If I start seeing defensiveness in me kind of a guardedness I'm going to say okay Lord that belongs on the cross with you because in 1 Corinthians 13 love does not insist on its own way.

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[37:55] If I start seeing envy in me that I'm going to send an email out of envy I'm going to say oh Lord that too has been crucified with Christ on the cross.

And then I'm not going to envy I'm going to weep with those who weep I'm going to rejoice with those who rejoice I'm going to love this person If you start seeing grudge in you you're avoiding someone because you're on a grudge against them it's it's the Alice Gary mix crucify that with Christ because love is not irritable or resentful it does not keep records of wrongs it forgives as God in Christ has forgiven me and I've been forgiven way more what this love ethic does for us this spirit working love ethic does for us it helps us to bear one another in love Ephesians 1 Ephesians 4 1-2-3 so church let me ask you what happens when more and more
Christians from our church are seeking to put to death the flesh and by the spirit bring to life this love we're not going to be consuming one another we're going to be building each other up in love or in Galatians 6 9-10 we're going to be doing good to each other this morning God has reminded us of the gospel we've been freed in Christ God has helped us to see a gospel warning give no opportunity for the flesh God has also helped us to see a gospel mandate to love one another at cost but I want to close by saying this we have a unique challenge as a church along these lines it's a unique challenge we must face together as a church because this call to love one another sacrificially would be hard enough if all of us were of the same ethnicity if all of us were of the same socioeconomic class if all of us were the same age if all of us had the same cultural background we would have all of those things in commons and it would still be hard to love one another because we still have to die to ourselves but God has called us as a church to live out the gospel in such a way we're praying that God will unite a people through the cross of very diverse backgrounds and that is going to raise a unique temptation with us because when we interact more with more and more people who are different than us we're going to be tempted to withdraw from them but we must not withdraw from them the gospel compels us to move towards people who are different than us we must purpose all the more not to use our freedom as an opportunity to withdraw in the flesh but to move forward to our people in love to serve them and not only will we experience depth of community and richness of diversity we will live out something
Jesus himself prayed for us for in John chapter 17 20 and 21 Jesus prayed I do not ask for these only but also for those who will believe in me through their word that's us that they may all be one just as you father are in me and I in you that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me not only is the quality of our fellowship dependent on our putting death the flesh and bringing to life love our witness to this city depends on it our freedom in Christ is not an opportunity for our flesh but an opportunity for our love let's pray
God in heaven we are in over our heads we make messes of our relationships this flesh that influences and exerts itself in us oh God it can wreak havoc among us God would you do a work in us by your spirit would you do a purifying work would you do a mortifying work in which you kill the flesh in us so that we can love one another unto you God we pray that you would grow us as a church not only to love one another in this room but to love those who are more and more different from us outside of this building God would you do a work and it can only be by your spirit only through the power of the cross by which you unite a people a diverse people in the worship of your name for the good of all people amen amen

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